



Can Senate trio salvage a climate bill?

Bid to get wider support would boost nuclear power, offshore drilling

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WASHINGTON - A Senate Democrat, Republican and independent on Wednesday announced a rescue effort for troubled climate legislation and quickly got some backing from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce as well as at least one environmental group.

Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., together with Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and Sen. Joseph Lieberman, I-Conn., met with Obama administration officials and later announced that they would work to patch together a bill that could pass the Senate.

An earlier bill introduced by Kerry and Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., that would impose mandatory limits on heat-trapping gases for the first time is stalled in committee because of a Republican boycott.

The senators said that they were not usurping that effort, but would take the best pieces of the Kerry-Boxer bill and try to broaden support by adding more incentives for nuclear power and offshore drilling. They also said they had the blessing of Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev.

"Our effort is to try to reach out; to broaden the base of support" for a bill, said Kerry.

More for nuclear, offshore drilling

Besides looking at creating a market for companies to trade an ever-decreasing number of carbon pollution permits, the senators are working with the White House on ways to expand the nuclear power industry through government incentives.

They are also discussing allowing more offshore oil and natural gas exploration and boosting research into how to cleanly burn abundant U.S. supplies of coal.

"Part of this initiative is to create a vision for energy independence and marry it up with responsible ... carbon pollution controls," Graham told reporters.

Tony Kreindler, a spokesman for the Environmental Defense Fund, said the three senators "have given a new life to a bipartisan process."

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, for its part, issued a statement calling a recent op-ed piece by Kerry and Graham "a solid, workable, commonsense foundation on which to craft a bill."

The chamber had earlier seen some high profile members leave in opposition to what they saw as a group refusing to take climate action.

Done by Denmark?

Left unanswered was how long the new process would take. Kerry said he would not be bound by a specific timeframe. But with a month left until 192 nations gather in Copenhagen, Denmark, to hammer out a new international treaty to slow global warming, the Obama administration and Democrats are under pressure to show movement on a climate bill.

The three senators met individually Wednesday with Energy Secretary Steven Chu, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Carol Browner, the president's assistant for energy and climate change.

Graham, who has come under fire in his home state for his support of action on climate change, said working on legislation was a "once in a lifetime opportunity" to solve two problems: heat-trapping carbon dioxide pollution and the country's dependence on foreign sources of fuel.

If environmental policy is not good business policy, you will not get 60 votes," Graham warned. "The green

economy is coming. We can either follow or lead."

The announcement came as the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee for a second straight day delayed voting on any changes to the Kerry-Boxer bill because no Republicans showed up.

Republican lawmakers are demanding a more thorough economic analysis of the measure, which would reduce heat-trapping gases by 83 percent by 2050, saying it will raise energy prices and cause job losses.

But the bill, which would set up a market for pollution permits, has also raised concerns among moderate Democrats, including Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont.

The House passed its version of the bill in June.

"This is the year that we've got to reach out to each other and get the 60 votes to get something done," said Lieberman.

Lieberman co-authored a global warming bill last year along with former Republican Sen. John Warner of Virginia and Boxer. The measure failed to get enough votes to advance on the Senate floor.

The Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report.

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